

To the Members of the California State Senate:

I am returning Senate Bill 1611 without my signature.

It is critically important for us to ensure that California is well prepared for fighting wildland fires and that we take action to improve our fire response system. Equally important is developing and implementing programs to reduce hazardous fuels that are causing wildfires in California to be more frequent, destructive, and costly to suppress.

This bill would require the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CDF) to staff at least four persons on all department fire engines during fire season, and additionally require CDF to staff at least four persons year-round in Southern California pursuant to a specified schedule. The bill also requires CDF to prepare a biennial fire prevention plan and conduct an evaluation of the cost-effectiveness of the four-person staffing on its fire engines.

On May 7, 2004, I issued an Executive Order which directed CDF to secure and deploy the following additional resources to protect the safety of persons and property from wildfires during the 2004 fire season:

- Assign a minimum crew of four firefighters to 53 CDF engines in the Counties of Riverside, San Bernardino, and San Diego;
- Assign additional resources in the CDF Contract Counties of Los Angeles, Ventura, and Orange as warranted based on established criteria of fire threat conditions;
- Place back into service ten refurbished fire engines to be staffed with a minimum crew of four firefighters to increase CDF fire engine resources to assist with wildfire suppression in the Counties of Riverside, San Bernardino, and San Diego;
- Staff four additional CDF Conservation Camp Fire Crews in the Southern portion of the state; and
- Lease, staff, and deploy a helicopter to be based in San Diego County.

The continued use of the Executive Order provides the flexibility to prioritize and increase wildland fire resources in areas of high fire danger that will help protect the citizens and the natural resources of this State against wildfires in a responsible and cost effective manner.

For these reasons I am returning this bill without my signature.

Sincerely,

Arnold Schwarzenegger